

# Cromwell Fire District

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FIRE DISTRICT OFFICE  
WATER DIVISION

FIRE DEPARTMENT  
FIRE MARSHAL'S OFFICE

## **BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS** **Special Fire Operations Committee**

Monday, July 19, 2021

5:30 PM

Coles Road Firehouse  
105 Coles Road  
Cromwell, CT

Present: Commissioners David Colligan (Chairman), Jason Hinnners, Robert Donohue and Charles Epstein. Also attending were Executive Director Julius Neto, Fire Chief Jason Balletto, Assistant Fire Chief Jason Brade, Fire Marshal Ray Saracco, and President Lee Brow. Dispatch Supervisor Justin Lonergan was on vacation.

- I. Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:30 PM.
- II. Approval of Agenda. A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the agenda as submitted. Chairman Colligan reminded everyone that this is considered a Special Meeting, therefore, the agenda cannot be changed.
- III. Approval of Meeting Minutes of June 16, 2021. A motion was made by Commissioner Hinnners, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to accept the Fire Operations Committee meeting minutes of June 16, 2021, as submitted.
- IV. Public Comment. There were no public comments to report.
- V. Communications Report. The Executive Director reported that the Communications Project is coming to an end soon. The flagpole is up. The only thing missing is the power to the cabinet. With the flooding the last couple of weeks the contractor got bombarded with new problems. They focused on keeping the neighbors and the Town happy without any additional charges for repairs. Power is anticipated for this week. The power should be turned on next week. The flag is up. Mr. Neto spoke to Stewart Popper from the Town to determine if the District needed to go before P & Z for lighting. They were discussing a solar powered light underneath the flag with the light shooting up. It will not affect any of the property owners in terms of light shining into their units.

Mr. Neto reported on what had happened last Friday afternoon, July 16, 2021. There was an issue with temperature at the Chemfeed building, inside the cabinet. Eric Roberts from the Water Division was at the site doing a check and heard the alarm going off. That site is not connected yet to the centralized monitoring system the District purchased because the Nike site is still not connected. Mr. Alvarado was dispatched that day. The temperature was 96/98

degrees inside. That temperature is not acceptable for electronic communication equipment. Norcom was called as well as the subcontractor, CSP. What happened at Chemfeed that day begins with a situation a few months back when the transformer was replaced or removed at no cost to the District because the vendor had not measured correctly. During the process of changing out the transformer, they did not connect the "neutral" wire. Mr. Roberts was asked to document his findings.

Chief Balletto reported there was a small fire that occurred inside the cabinet. That is what triggered the loss of power. The system was on battery power, but they found the problem before the battery went out. Otherwise Norcom would have had to replace everything which would have been very costly. They did admit that it could have been human error, but did not get into the specifics.

The District has put CSP on notice to inform them that this is not acceptable. They are the subcontractors for the electrical work. Although the temperature was 96 degrees, it was caught early in the day so they did not think a lot of damage was done. They did not think they needed to replace any of the components, only the breakers on the panel which had fire damage. There have not been any issues since that incident. Mr. Neto noted that this is the second major event that has happened to that cabinet. When the system is fully operational, the District is going to red flag that site and have a serious discussion with Norcom before final payment is made. The District is going to need assurances and maybe an extended year warrantee on that voting site in case of any future problems. Commissioner Donohue noted that a neutral wire does not disconnect by itself.

Chief Balletto reported that since this has happened, the Department has come up with a backup plan. He and Mr. Roberts went to E & W Distributors and purchased a cord which is a 30 amp to a 50 amp so they can connect their generator to the server. If it happens again, they can still supply the server off the generator. Chairman Colligan asked if the same principle can be used for the Holy Apostles site with the generator. Maybe the same plug can be used there in order to be hooked up to the light tower. They are planning to use the light tower as a backup because it has a big tank on it. Mr. Neto reported that the site has been stabilized, and is fully operational. The sooner the Nike site is up and running, the sooner the monitoring system can be functioning. The District is of the opinion that Norcom was aware that the problem was human error. The District is not happy with this latest turn of events, and the Executive Director is committed to protecting the District's interests and will do whatever it takes to do so.

Chief Balletto also reported that there were no issues with communications during the two storms. Everything worked well.

The Executive Director reported that he has done some preliminary numbers and it looks like they will be under budget with the Communications Project. He did not have a final number, but there should be a little over \$90,000 left. The Executive Director suggested using some of those funds for the new telephone system which is part of the Communication project. The Executive Director should have a better number by next month and hopes the group can think about repurposing those dollars.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnners and unanimously approved to accept the Communications Report as presented.***

- VI. Reports of Chief Officers. Chief Balletto reported that his report had been submitted to the Commissioners for the monthly Board meeting. The Chief had no changes to the report. He asked if there were any questions he could answer. The Chief gave a quick overview of his report because the Commissioners did not receive their meeting packets until 9 AM this morning.
- The Chief reported that they were dispatched to 208 calls. 108 calls were EMS. They responded to 17 fire calls. There were no turnovers. The last rain storm they did 18 calls in 2 ½ hours. The men and women of the Cromwell Fire Department went above and beyond the call of duty. The Chief could not be prouder.
  - He asked for help from the Emergency Manager on July 9, but a process had not been established. Going forward they are trying to establish a working relationship with the Town especially when dealing with these types of emergencies. They were unable to sump pump any basements because of the overwhelming amount of calls. The Chief did not want to do any pumping because logistically and liability-wise it would not be sensible to leave a sump pump running in someone's basement and then have the firefighters leave that premises to go to another call. They secured a lot of gas lines and electrical buildings.
  - The Police Department also got overwhelmed that day. They asked if they could use one of the Department's engines to draft water out of the area. The Chief made the decision not to do that because of the liability issues. He could not afford to lose one of the engines to sucking something up out of the ground. The Police Department did have an oversized pump to pump out so their needs were addressed.
  - Commissioner Hinnners added that he was in Florida at the time of the storm and was listening to everything that transpired through the communication system. He gave kudos to the Chief and his staff for their handling of the situation.

Assistant Chief Brade gave his report. This is the first meeting after the TPC Tournament. He reported that everything went extremely well for the tournament. He formally thanked Joe Palmieri for the use of his facility there. They were able to keep all of their equipment inside the gates, and cameras behind barbed-wired fences throughout the whole tournament. Mr. Palmieri also let the Fire Department borrow the generator there at a minute's notice so they could power the RV that they had.

The Ass't Chief also reported that communications worked extremely well at the TPC. They utilized the command channel there and were ready to use the fire ground channel if there was anything interior. Communications there was better than it has ever been in previous years at the TPC. The TPC had a lot of issues with radios. The State came in and shut them down on a channel because they were interfering with Hartford intercity.

The Ass't Chief and staff have some ideas going forward about utilizing their radios and maybe giving St. Francis one of Cromwell's portables if they are at the TPC next year. There was a fire in one of the PGA live trailers. It was relatively small. There was also a serious medical issue there. They were able to resume play without a lot of disruption to what was going on. They had a shed fire which was called in as a structure fire. There were issues with water supply. They discussed this with Joe Palmieri, and they have developed a plan going forward.

Commissioner Colligan was invited for a tour of the TPC setup from Assistant Chief Brade. Commissioner Colligan complimented the Fire Marshal's Office, the Assistant Chief and the Chief for the outstanding job everyone had done. It was very well coordinated and put

together. Regarding the storms, he commented that the Town does not understand emergency management. The Fire Department did a good job with the manpower they had.

- A. Fire Marshal's Office Report. Mr. Saracco's report had been submitted to the Commissioners for their monthly meeting. The Commissioners received their packets today so the Fire Marshal was asked to give a summary of his report. He reported that there were four plan reviews. There were also tents for the TPC which were also plan reviews. They had other plan reviews that were not so big. They had the Verizon Tower which is more like a courtesy plan rather than fire prevention. They also did a tent for a wedding which was during the TPC. There was a trailer fire at the TPC. He heard back from the PGA Live thanking them for their quick response. They received their report right away, and they were very happy with Cromwell's work and their discreteness.

The FMO had 49 inspections this month keeping up with that par level. They are working their way into next year's inspections. Mr. Saracco had done a couple of FYI reports, such as time of day when fires happen, what type of manpower is needed. There were 6 investigations in June. They are up to 20 for the year. There were a few more in July. Fire categories are noted in that report. Auto fires are the biggest fires right now. Brush fire was second highest. Careless use of chemicals is also a popular cause of fires or small explosions. Mr. Saracco also included some informational notes in his report such as the day of the week that is highest for fires occurring. The answer is Wednesdays. He also gave some data on alarms by month. He also did a report called, a Cost/Loss value. It is good for NIFRS by telling how much was saved. They also gave the C.O. for two buildings at the landing. The Fire Marshal emailed the Chief the information.

Regarding the Red Lion, the Fire Marshal has been communicating with Bank 360 who is the owner of that property. An abatement letter was mailed to them from the FMO. Mr. Saracco was able to find a contact number, and left a message for one of the administrators there. He has the person's cell phone number and will continue to be persistent. He wants the property boarded up and fenced. He does not think that Cromwell crews should be going in there. He will be requesting a plan of action.

The Executive Director gave an update on some legal issues. He received some feedback from the District's attorney and the Town's attorney. There is a consensus that the Commissioners are and have the ability to pass an ordinance that allows the FMO fee structure to be a part of that ordinance. Therefore, the District can implement the fee structure for the Fire Marshal's Office. He suggests the next step in the process would be to draft the ordinance to meet all the standards and attach a fee structure to the ordinance. He would like to have this implemented as soon as possible. He will look into whether or not there needs to be a Public Hearing on the ordinance.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Hinnens and unanimously approved to accept the reports from the Chief Officers and Fire Marshal.*

- VII. Firefighter/EMT Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability. Chief Balletto explained that it has been difficult to get part-time people during the summer months. The Department has been maintaining as much as they can to make sure those positions are staffed. An individual is starting tomorrow as the Department's newest person. His name is Firefighter Newton. He will be receiving his PPE and getting established. The Chief and Assistant Chief established an orientation process which they started with Firefighter Newton.

The Chief also reported that they were supposed to interview 12 people last week. That number was reduced to 7. It ended up being a final number of 3. He gave two conditional hires to two individuals. One of them just got out as a recruit from CFA. He called today to inform the Chief he is considering a position in Norwalk. Another individual that was hired is from Savannah, GA. His wife is in the military and was transferred to this area. He had worked in the Savannah, GA fire department for 10 – 12 years. He was a driver of apparatus and a truck and rescue boss.

On July 23 the Indeed app. will be closed. There are approximately 15 applications to review. There were some applicants that slipped through the cracks so each application has to be reviewed.

All the apparatus are running right now. The Chief has been in constant contact with Chris Logan. One thing they need to do is try to relax the response of Ladder 3. The brakes need to be replaced again for Ladder 3. They also need to change out the tires because they are at the 4 year mark for the tires to be changed out.

Right now 4C is out of service. It was backed into a pole without a person backing the driver up. That person will be required to review the Apparatus Accident Protocol that was established by the Chiefs. It means that those individuals will have to be remedially trained. When they return to duty the Chief will meet with them individually to discuss their behavior. He did receive a report from the driver and the officer on duty. The Chief will be working on redoing the apparatus driving responsibilities SOP. There is a lot of information missing from that SOP. He is going to restructure the SOP so that people will be held accountable for their driving.

Before former Assistant Chief Stacy went back on the floor, a power point presentation of orientation was established for all new hires. The Department will be establishing protocol from that point. They will be dedicating all the new hires to a single officer. That officer will be signing off for the new hire. Once that person is signed off, they can go to any other shift. The Chief added that Firefighter Ryan Belini has completed Fire I with Hazardous materials and misc. operations. He also completed every skill that is in the Department's task book for orientation. He is now qualified to sit on the back of the engine and respond to fire calls. He went above and beyond. He will be a huge loss if he should decide to go somewhere else.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to accept the Staffing, Hiring and Response Capability report as presented.*

## VIII. Old Business

- A. Update on Strategic Plan. Chief Balletto has had conversations with President Brow regarding creating a Strategic Plan for the Fire Department. The last one was created in 2017. It was an outside vendor that did the Strategic Plan. The President had asked Chief Balletto to get three quotes for a Strategic Plan. He received one quote and distributed copies to the Committee members. The second one had a quote of \$80,000, and they were not willing to work with the Department. The company is Strategic Fire Services. The person that owns it is Jason Bremmer from the CT Fire Academy. He started a business that deals with strategic planning, recruitment and morale building for fire departments. He has done many departments. The last one was the Greenwich Fire Department. The Chief distributed copies of that plan to Committee members.

The Chief was asked to do a Strategic Plan for the Department. He did not think it would be in the best interest of the Department to do this internally. The Chief read the plan that was done in 2017. He was embarrassed for whoever created that document. It was not a good plan or how a strategic plan should work. It did not address any of the problems the Department has. One of the things they need to do is involve multiple stakeholders; not just internally, but externally, especially within the community. The vendor needs to establish that.

The Strategic Plan will take approximately 3 months to complete. One of the things the vendor will do is an internal questionnaire. They will have sessions with various employees, part-time scheduled, unscheduled, career, Commissioners, etc. They will then do some information gathering at Town Hall to determine what is expected from the Fire Department by the Town Manager, Mayor and Deputy Mayor. They will also review the GIS system to identify what the logistic needs are. The final outcome of the Strategic Plan will be objectives that have been identified. It will be the Department's responsibility to dedicate those objectives to a certain entity. Once an entity is identified, they will have up to 5 years to complete that objective. The Chief distributed information to give the Committee an idea of how a strategic plan is created and how a vendor drafts a plan. David Bremmer is also an officer in the Southbury Fire Department.

The Chief also mentioned Mark Waters who took Chief Balletto's position in the Norwich Fire Department. Mr. Waters is also involved in grant writing which is also part of the Strategic Plan. Commissioner Colligan saw a quote from this vendor at \$21,000 and commented that this will need to come before the full Board of Commissioners. The Chief's intention was to distribute this information to the Committee and the Commissioners so they can start to think about a process for this. The vendor had asked about a timeline. The Chief was not thinking about something in the near future, but maybe next year.

Cromwell's plan is needed for the Dept. of Homeland Security and Risk Management. It is also a great help for strategic planning and ISO. This is also one of the things that the citizens of Cromwell requested, they want to see a 5 year plan. The Chief added that if the District were to do this internally, they would not get the results they are looking for. The 2017 plan had some information that should not have been in there. He thought the best opportunity would be to step back from the 2017 plan and move forward with the information the Chief has provided. Once the new plan has been completed, a presentation will be given to everyone. The vendor will not accept payment until it is all approved. The vendor also mentioned they can do a formal RFP if the District requests it.

***A motion was made by Commissioner Donohue, seconded by Commissioner Hinners and unanimously approved to give permission to the Chief to get a final price or estimate for the Strategic Plan to be put into next year's budget and have the Chief provide some documentation for that estimate. The group asked the Chief to try to get at least one more estimate for a comparison. He will be getting at least one more estimate to present.***

- B. Update on Equipment Replacement and Apparatus Replacement, 5 – 10 Year Plan. Chief Balletto created an apparatus replacement plan and for the next 10 years. The first plan is to replace the three pieces of apparatus that need to be replaced ASAP. He outlined a replacement schedule starting with the first to be replaced on the list being immediate.

Funding has not been allocated for replacement in a long time. The second page outlines what to allocate for funding for the next 10 years to replace all the apparatus. He also listed what needs to be allocated in the apparatus replacement fund for the next 10 years based on the priorities. Once the year 2028 is reached, the number will go down substantially. That is where the Department wants to be. They are starting from scratch. The number can go down if they decide to get rid of apparatus. He distributed copies of his plan.

This Committee also discussed re-chassis an ambulance. The Chief received a quote for the re-chassis. The quote just consists of taking a box off and putting another box on. That does not include if they take the box off and there is rusting or cracking of the frame. The Chief gave a projected estimate of \$250,000 for a Type III ambulance, box type like they have now. The numbers in his report are all projected. It will cost between \$175,000 and \$225,000 to replace an ambulance, without a lot of bells and whistles. Chris Logan contacted Frazier to get an idea of what the price is from Frazier. The Chief's opinion is when the funding in place, he would rather replace now and re-chassis later. He thinks by re-chassis they are throwing bad money into good. If there is any other work that needs to be done when the box is removed, they will be in trouble.

The Chief discussed using sprinters, but they need to be able to put PPE in those. They still have to respond to fires, and you cannot put any PPE in the back of a sprinter because of carcinogens. They have to be stored completely separate. Because Cromwell is Fire/EMS, they need a Type III or Type I. The Chief wants to compare the Type III and Type I to see what the differences would be between the two. Chris Logan agreed with the Chief that because of the roads and the miles that are put on the ambulances, maybe it is beneficial to go to a Type I. 4B has over 160,000 miles on it. That needs to be replaced now. The Chief explained how he would cycle those apparatus out.

The Chief also discussed the quote for a Tack. That number was very high at \$750,000. He does not think that a primary piece to meet the needs of the community, should be bought off the shelf. This should be built the way the Department wants it to meet the needs of the community and the equipment they are going to carry. It needs to last for 20 years. He proposes to build Tack 4 the way the Fire Department wants it. Tack 4 is a rescue engine and should be built the way the Department wants it. Engine 1 & 2 can be bought off the shelf because they are standard engines. The President added that the District has HGAC as a buying power. To replace the entire fleet in the next 10 years will cost \$4 million.

Commissioner Colligan suggested that all the information the Chief provided on apparatus and ambulances be forwarded to the Chair of the newly appointed Apparatus Committee, Commissioner Hinners.

Chief Balletto continued his discussion on equipment; specifically SCBA's, replacements and repairs. The number he has come up with is double the number from last year. On Tack 4 they are using Scott 50's because the 75's are crashing. Scott 50's are about \$1,997/\$2,003. Scott 75's are \$2,008/\$2,013. They are planning on doing an evaluation. There are 35 Scott packs on the apparatus. 23 have to be replaced immediately, due to excessive use, damage and inability to be certified or repaired. He received two quotes. One was from Shipman's for the SCBA's. He distributed copies of the quotes he received. They had also contacted Firemat NSA. He explained that the NSA's are all computers. They have a rechargeable battery that hooks into the back of the harvest pack.

There is an additional charge for the batteries and the charger for the Scott packs, NSA's. It is unfortunate that Cromwell did not take advantage of a regional grant that was out there for SCBA's. The number for those is \$174,000. The purchase will get 23 SCBA's, 2 SCBA packs, AV3000 HT mask. It also has an accountability component. Everyone receiving one gets a tag. The tag goes when the SCBA's are checked prior to the beginning of a shift. It gets scanned in. Once it is scanned in, that person is dedicated to that Scott pack. It goes to the Incident Commander's I-pad. It is an accountability of everyone working and who is on scene. It will be a huge resource for the unscheduled and the volunteers.

The Chief also discussed the cascade system. They have 5 or 10 years to prepare for a new cascade system. The price on that is \$49,000. This is a great opportunity to replace the 23 SCBA's then we can establish funding down the road. The Chief emphasized that the District or department has to prepare. He noted that in evaluating needs when he first came on board, there wasn't a leader in place to give the Commissioners the information that they needed. He wants to be able to set up a plan to have in place so that if anything should happen to the Chief, someone else would be able to take over the plan without hesitation. If there is any thought about getting rid of equipment, there should be a conversation with everyone involved to determine if that is the right way to go. They have to be prepared to explain their actions to the public. The President suggested using the HGAC to see what they may be able to do.

*A motion was made by Commissioner Epstein, seconded by Commissioner Donohue and unanimously approved to forward the apparatus replacement list by Chief Balletto to the Chairman of the newly formed Apparatus Committee. The Chairman also asked the Chief to get prices from the Houston/Galveston Consortium. He also suggested that equipment replacement remain on the agenda for updates under Old Business.*

The Executive Director had some comments going forward. There was a lot of information given today. There was also a lot of numbers and expense. The need was identified, and now they need to figure out how to meet those needs will be the next phase. The Commissioners will need to prioritize and decide how to fund those needs. The Executive Director will need direction from the Commission regarding borrowing because part of the budget cycle was taking some money out of Capital including the items just discussed. He will need a timeline and whether or not they will need to contact the bond counsel or private loan. Part of the plan is having monies budgeted to borrow some money for some of these items. Need to identify decisions, reasons and dates and a long term vision.

## IX. New Business

- A. Discussion and Recommendations Regarding Moving the Chief's Office to Coles Road.  
One of the things the Chief identified in the budget is allocating funding to remodel Court St. They are one complaint away from having to address all the issues. One of the issues discussed in his interview was to figure out ways to save money. One of the biggest ways to save money is to move the Chief's office out of Court St. He wants to include his office, his administrative assistant and the two assistant chiefs. If they were to move to Coles Road, the administrative office at Court Street could become a male bunk room. The Chief's office would become the officer's bunk room and locker area. The bunk room that is in place right now would become the female bunk room. The officer's office right now that is a bunk room would become an officer's office and a firefighter's office



to do the report ranking. Right now most of the EPCR's and Red Alert are done in the lobby which is open to the public. These things are supposed to be performed in a controlled area.

He also discussed meetings. He had 6 meetings this week, and he is embarrassed to have them at the Court St. station. Anyone that comes to the firehouse has to walk through a day room. The other issue he has is there is no privacy, no confidentiality. Anything that is discussed in his office gets out. An example is when he had a staff meeting, and two hours later individuals were coming into the Chief's office upset about the meeting that he had. He also added that if any of the female firefighters get pregnant and have to nurse after giving birth, they have to establish an area where they can nurse. This proposal will give an opportunity for them to have their own secluded room.

The Chief thinks Coles Road is a great opportunity. There are 5 offices there. There is also a training environment there. The Chief is working with many outside agencies to start doing training classes here at zero cost to the District. He is looking at Middlesex hosting Fire I and Fire II classes at Coles Road. It will get more students in those classes and will reduce the tuition that is needed. This move will also give the Chief the opportunity to be in constant contact with his apparatus repair supervisor. He also wants to work with building maintenance on the SCBA's. There is no tracking record in place for SCBA's. He wants to be able to track everything to Coles Road and wants to use the outside areas for training. He wants to make Coles Road the headquarters of the Cromwell Fire Department. The cost to move from Court St. to Coles Rd. will be minimal. There is better accessibility (handicapped) to the Chief's office at Coles Road rather than Court St. It will relax the spending that needs to be done to remodel Court St. The timeline the Chief has for this proposed move would be next Spring.

The President is not a big fan of moving fire headquarters out of Court St. because it has always been there. However, the Chief had some very good points. Chairman Colligan asked for some numbers. He wanted to see the logistics plan. He discussed moving the gym or some of its equipment to the other firehouses which has been requested by fire personnel. If gear is stored at Coles Road, the apparatus floor can be opened up. Up to this point there has been no documentation of PPE.

The Executive Director explained that this proposal by the Chief is just a concept and a vision at this point. There needs to be a lot more discussion. This discussion at this meeting was a good starting point. The President asked for more information with more than one option. Chairman Colligan agreed. He also wanted more information on how to streamline operations and properly utilize what we have.

- X. Commissioners' Comments. Commissioner Epstein thinks Coles Road is underutilized. What is important is what the Department does for response. The District has a new Chief with a new vision. The Chief's packet spells out the equipment that needs to be considered right away. He thinks the group should seriously look at some of the Chief's ideas.
- XI. Adjournment. There being no further business, a motion was made by Commissioner Hanners, seconded by Commissioner Epstein and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David J. Colligan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David J. Colligan, Chairman

Nancy Deegan  
Recording Secretary  
7-30-21